

XX = Council relevance

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN  
TRINITY COLLEGE**

**Undergraduate Studies Committee**

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A meeting of Undergraduate Studies Committee was held on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015 at 2.15pm in the Board Room.

Present: Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer, Professor Gillian Martin (*Chair*)  
 Ms Katie Byrne, Education Officer, Students' Union  
 Dean of Students, Professor Kevin O'Kelly  
 Professor Gloria Kirwan, School of Social Work and Social Policy  
 Professor Jarlath Killeen, School of English  
 Professor Fáinche Ryan, Confederal School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics  
 Professor Mary-Lee Rhodes, School of Business  
 Professor James Hanrahan, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies  
 Professor Derek O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science  
 Professor David Wilkins, School of Mathematics  
 Professor Pauline Sloane, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences  
 Professor Christine Poulter, School of Drama, Film and Music  
 Professor Elaine Moriarty, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
 Professor Howard Smith, School of Psychology  
 Professor Mark Hennessy, School of Natural Sciences  
 Professor Des Ryan, School of Law  
 Professor Ken Mok, School of Biochemistry and Immunology  
 Professor Mike Brady, School of Computer Science and Statistics  
 Professor Ciaran Simms, School of Engineering  
 Professor Charles Patterson, School of Physics  
 Professor Jane Farrar, School of Genetics and Microbiology  
 Dr Ciara O'Farrell, Senior Academic Developer  
 Professor Sharon O'Donnell, School of Nursing and Midwifery  
 Professor Martina Hennessy, School of Medicine  
 Professor Astrid Sasse, School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
 Professor Sarah Smyth, Director of TSM

Apologies: Academic Secretary, Ms Patricia Callaghan  
 Senior Tutor, Professor Claire Laudet  
 Professor Stephen Connon, School of Chemistry  
 Professor Rachel Moss, School of Histories and Humanities  
 Professor Michael Shevlin, School of Education  
 Mr Trevor Peare, Library Representative  
 Ms Ciara Coughlan, Student Representative  
 Ms Cliona Hannon, Director, Trinity Access Programmes

In attendance: Ms Elaine Egan; Susan Power, Admissions Officer, for item USC/14-15/044; Dr Anne O'Gara, President, Marino Institute of Education, for item USC/14-15/045

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**USC/14-15/040 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> January 2015 were approved subject to a minor clarification in minute USC/14-15/033.

**USC/14-15/041 Matters arising**

**USC/14-15/04** Details of the general papers for the Scholarship examination in 2016 had been circulated to the Central Scholarship Committee (CSC) and were approved at its meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015. The examination model was subsequently approved by Council at its meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> February 2015. Council also approved the proposal of the CSC that to be eligible for Scholarship, candidates should be

required to obtain a majority of first class marks with the remaining papers achieving a mark of 65% or above. Board will shortly consider the proposed implementation of the general paper and the requirement to achieve 65% or above.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked USC members for their input so far and advised that sample papers would be required for next years' candidates. She reminded the Committee that handbooks should clearly outline which paper/s or section/s of paper/s are general and provide a detailed breakdown of weighting within papers.

**USC/14-15/034** The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer and the Dean of Graduate Studies had met on two occasions with staff from the Academic Registry and SUSU to discuss the issues with SITS that had been identified by members of USC. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer advised the meeting that the awards calculation function in courses such as TSM and other two subject courses where the award results are driven by a combination of the third and fourth years, will not be delivered on time for the annual examination session in 2015.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer had also met with and provided details of the issues to Professor Frank Bannister, the chair of the newly reconstituted SITS User Group. The terms of reference and membership of the User Group are being finalised. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer will nominate two people to sit on the User Group and will shortly be in touch with members of USC in this regard.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer will sit on the Academic Registry Enhancement Steering Committee and will attend a meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

#### **USC/14-15/042 Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer's report**

##### **Education Project**

A document titled 'The Trinity Education Project' was circulated for the meeting. The document had previously been circulated to Council for its meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> February 2015. The project aims to "further embed a distinctive education within the university" and to "develop the curriculum such that it combines disciplinary expertise and deep technical knowledge with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills." A Steering Group will be established in the next number of weeks and the overall project will be broken down into a number of sub-projects and project managers and sponsors will be identified. Various other aspects of the Strategic Plan are currently being scoped, including the aim to increase participation of non-traditional applicants to 25%. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer is setting up a Working Group to consider how this 25% target can best be met and a discussion paper will be brought to a future meeting of USC.

##### **Prospectus 2016**

A document with proposals on the redesign of the prospectus 2016, dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015, had been circulated for information. Notes of the Admissions Forum meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 had also been circulated. The Admissions Liaison Officer had proposed to the Forum that Trinity's undergraduate prospectus was in need of redesign and modernisation. The Admissions Liaison Officer had conducted a review of prospectuses for universities in Ireland and the UK and sought to incorporate best practice from these whilst still retaining the traditional strengths of the Trinity prospectus. The Trinity prospectus is very information-rich, but not as visually appealing as some of our competitors.

The Admissions Liaison Officer had run two focus groups; one comprising sixth year pupils and the other Junior Freshman students in Trinity. Following his review and consultation, he provided a number of suggestions on how the prospectus might be updated. It needs to have a much greater emphasis on the student perspective and

should have additional images and more student profiles. It needs to be more lively and appealing, whilst ensuring that the richness of the information is retained. Revisions to course entries will be required and a sample entry will be provided to assist with this. The structure of the prospectus had also been discussed at the Admissions Forum and members had agreed that it may be advisable to present courses on a thematic basis rather than according to faculty. USC members did not raise any concerns with a change to the order of the courses, once this did not promote one course over another. The timeline for revisions is short as the first full draft needs to be submitted to the designer in mid-April.

#### USC/14-15/043 TGRUSE (IUA Task Group on Reform of University Selection and Entry): Progress Report

A memorandum from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer with an update on the IUA Task Group on Reform of University Selection and Entry, dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015, had been circulated. The memorandum had previously been circulated to Council for its meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> February 2015. A number of items that are currently under consideration by TGRUSE were introduced for discussion:

##### 1) Introduction of a new common points scale

In 2017 the number of grade bands in the Leaving Certificate will be reduced to 8: H1 to H8 and O1 to O8. Part of the rationale for reducing the number of bands is to relieve some of the pressure on students to attain minor increases in marks so as to fall into a higher grade band and achieve higher points. The introduction of the new bands will necessitate a new common points scale for entry to third-level. In designing a new common points scale, consideration needs to be given to whether the scale should be linear or non-linear, incrementing or decrementing. The current system is based on 5 point increments, with the exception of students achieving an A1 grade who benefit from a 10-point increment, both at Higher and Ordinary Level. A non-linear scale would arguably reduce random selection. TGRUSE is also considering the point of intersection between the Higher and Ordinary levels; currently a Higher C3 and an Ordinary A1 both generate 60 points, although the rationale for this alignment requires clarification. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC) are undertaking work on the alignment of Higher and Ordinary levels over the next few years. TGRUSE has also been discussing whether points should be awarded for a H7 (30-39%) as a means of incentivising students to take higher level papers.

A number of members did not agree with awarding points for a result of 30-39% as they felt that achieving a pass in a Leaving Certificate paper was something that most pupils should be able to achieve and awarding points for a very poor performance would not be prudent.

##### 2) Broader entry routes

The IUA Council had agreed a number of principles on broader entry routes. A route should be retained or set up:

- to admit students to a broad area of study
- where it is generally accepted that a separate entry route is necessary or to admit students to a professional programme
- where demand significantly exceeds supply and
- to admit students to a small number of disciplines of strategic priority for the institution.

All universities, including Trinity, have been asked by TGRUSE to complete a template with details of the direct entry courses that will be in place in 2017. Trinity has signalled to TGRUSE that it is about to begin a period of educational reform which makes it difficult to predict the number and configuration of entry routes. TSM continues to be in the spotlight as it has approximately 179 separate entry routes.

The idea of implementing a common entry route, whereby students would choose their course at a later stage, was discussed. Some members felt that this could help

students to ensure that they choose the correct course. However, members also pointed out that in light of the College's strategic aim to increase the percentage of international students, it is easier to attract non-EU students when they are guaranteed entry to a specific denominated course.

### **3) Simplified and harmonised matriculation and minimum entry requirements across the seven universities**

TGRUSE is seeking to simplify and harmonise matriculation and minimum entry requirements across the seven universities. It considers that the existing complexities and variety in matriculation requirements can lead to applicants being deemed ineligible for courses they would likely have been able to complete successfully. Matriculation requirements should be set at a level where a student has a good prospect of completing the first year of a programme and progressing. The proposal outlined in the TGRUSE interim briefing document includes the achievement of a minimum standard (i.e., 'an academic achievement, attained in a single sitting, of a minimum points score, calculated across a maximum of 6 subjects and a minimum of 3 subjects') and proof of competence in the language of instruction for the course sought. The NUI colleges would retain their requirement for Irish.

The proposal is at variance with Trinity's current matriculation requirements which include a pass in English and either i) a pass in mathematics and a pass in a language other than English, or ii) a pass in Latin and a pass in a subject other than a language.

Discussions in TGRUSE have centred around a minimum cut-off floor of around 300 points: this is considered to represent a level that is indicative of a student being able to complete and progress beyond the first year of a programme. However, alongside this it may be desirable to require students to present with a certain number of higher level subjects if it is found to be beneficial in terms of their progression.

Some members expressed a concern that removing the requirements for a pass in mathematics and a language could potentially lessen the number of second-level pupils taking these subjects and, also, that removing the foreign language requirement would be a retrograde step: we should continue to encourage proficiency in foreign languages in our students. The SU Education Officer felt that the requirement for a pass in a foreign language can severely disadvantage students who are not talented at learning languages and the workload involved may lead to other subjects being neglected. A member noted that College should continue to focus not just on producing a student who can pass examinations, but rather on producing graduates who will contribute to society throughout their lives.

TGRUSE is preparing a discussion document on the Matriculation and Minimum Entry requirements which will be brought to Academic Councils for their review and consideration in March. A decision will be required by May/June in time for second-level pupils entering the senior cycle in September 2015.

#### **USC/14-15/044 Proposed A-Level Recalibration Model**

A summary document on the proposed recalibration model, 'IUA TGRUSE Recommendation: Revised model for converting A-Level grades to Leaving Certificate Points' dated February 2015, had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer welcomed the Admissions Officer to the meeting for this item. The Admissions Officer had compiled a document comparing the current scoring scheme with the proposed scheme and this was tabled at the meeting. *(Both documents are appended to the minutes)*. The current model for converting A-Level grades to Leaving Certificate (LC) points had been adopted by the Irish universities in 2010. The model can be seen as a barrier to those A-Level applicants who do not sit four A-Levels - the majority of applicants - as they cannot realistically compete for high points courses in the Republic of Ireland.

In 2014, TGRUSE was asked to consider whether the conversion model could be revised to make it more equitable for A-Level students. University Admissions Officers were tasked with proposing an alternative to be used from 2016/17. In doing so, they had to adhere to the following principles:

- 1) Points should be weighted in favour of the first three A-Levels;
- 2) additional points should be awarded in recognition of achievement in a fourth A-Level or for a fourth AS-Level;
- 3) a revised model should ensure that A-Level grade distribution and LC grade distribution across respective populations are matched as closely as possible;
- 4) a revised model should be easily understandable for all audiences.

The proposed model retains the existing 6:4 ratio for LC subject : A-Level that had been identified in the 'Irish Leaving Certificate on the UCAS Tariff' report in 2004. The model recognises the extra achievement required to sit a fourth A-level or AS and maintains an A-Level grade distribution broadly in line with LC grade distribution.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked the Admissions Officer. USC approved the proposal as presented.

**USC/14-15/045 Proposal for the validation of a Bachelor in Science (Early Childhood Education)**

A proposal from Marino Institute of Education (MIE) for the validation of a Bachelor in Science (Early Childhood Education) was circulated. The Senior Lecturer welcomed the President of MIE to the meeting. The President thanked Sorcha De Brunner, Trinity Teaching and Learning, and staff in the School of Education for their assistance with the course proposal.

The programme is a response to the changing landscape in the early childhood sector and also to the increasing diversity of the population in Ireland. Research has shown that increasing the qualifications of early childhood practitioners leads to an increase in quality provision. It is anticipated that school leavers and early childhood practitioners are the most likely candidates to follow the proposed programme. The programme is designed to equip students to become "confident, competent and reflective practitioners in the early years field". The course is of four years duration and would involve a blended approach, including face-to-face provision, online engagement with materials and practice-based learning. The programme will include non-assessed placements in the first three years, while the final year will incorporate an assessed 8-week placement and a substantial research component.

In response to a query, the President noted that staff on MIE's Master in Education Studies (Intercultural Education) had assisted with the creation of modules on cultural diversity and linguistic skills to reflect the diverse nature of Irish society. The Senior Academic Developer commended the varied methods of assessments to be used, but felt that there was a misalignment between the type of assessments used and some of the module learning outcomes. In response to members' comments, the President undertook to ensure that adequate voice care content and also content on child protection matters be included in the programme. Members expressed concerns that the locations for placements may not be formally quality assured and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer also sought reassurance on the monitoring of the non-assessed placements.

- XX** Subject to the above points being addressed, members approved the proposal for proceeding to external review and Council.

It was noted that the course had been included in the CAO handbook prior to going through the formal approval process. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer reminded the President that proposals must progress through College's quality assurance procedures and be approved before being placed in the CAO handbook.

**USC/14-15/046 Plagiarism - Feedback from Schools**

A number of responses received from Schools had been circulated. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer thanked members for feedback received to date. Many responses indicated that the College procedures for dealing with plagiarism are perceived as being cumbersome and not sufficiently nuanced for dealing with different types of plagiarism cases. In certain instances this has led to plagiarism being dealt with outside of the formal framework.

A discussion ensued and it was noted that while it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between intentional and non-intentional plagiarism, the sanctions applied for each type should be different. The Senior Academic Developer outlined that there is a larger problem with issues of academic integrity than with deliberate plagiarism. Most of what is currently classed as plagiarism occurs through error and lack of knowledge.

A member raised a concern that in her role as tutor she has encountered a broad range of responses to plagiarism cases that are similar in nature. One problem with dealing with a case informally is that the plagiarism will usually go unrecorded and a member felt it could be worthwhile to create a register where an informal process is recorded so that if a student were found to plagiarise again, more punitive sanctions could be applied.

Some Schools do not currently make Turnitin available for students to use as a tool for checking their own work prior to submission and members felt that this mechanism should be made available to all students. It was agreed that while College has a number of useful resources available on avoiding plagiarism, these should be streamlined into one source that students can easily access. It was also noted that were Turnitin to be streamlined with BlackBoard, it would be more visible for students to use. Schools should have a verifiable method of stating that students have been educated in avoiding plagiarism: one possible solution is through a system of tracking completion of modules on how to avoid it.

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies/Senior Lecturer will liaise with the Dean of Graduate Studies on the submitted responses and on the points raised at the meeting. A working group will be set up to consider the issues raised by members and to review the current regulations. A number of USC and GSC members will be invited to join the group.

**USC/14-15/047 Any other business**

There was no other business.

**USC/14-15/048 Items for noting**

USC noted the following documents which had been circulated for information:

1. Format and Composition of Courts of First Appeal 2014/15, dated February 2015
2. Grade conversion tables
3. Proposal for Module in Modern Irish Writing, from the School of English
4. Admissions forum
  - a) Minutes of the meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015
  - b) Document with proposals on the redesign of the Prospectus 2016, dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015

## IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION

### TASK GROUP ON REFORM OF UNIVERSITY SELECTION AND ENTRY

#### Recommendation:

#### Revised model for converting A-Level grades to Leaving Certificate Points

#### Background

In March 2014, the IUA Task Group on Reform of University Selection and Entry (TGRUSE), tasked by University Chief Officers to make recommendations regarding the reform of selection and entry of students to their universities, was asked to consider whether the model used to convert A-Level grades to Leaving Certificate (LC) points could be revised, to remove what was increasingly being seen in both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom as a significant disincentive for A-Level candidates who consider applying to universities in the Republic of Ireland.

|    | A-Level<br>(A2) | AS |
|----|-----------------|----|
| A* | 150             |    |
| A  | 135             | 65 |
| B  | 120             | 60 |
| C  | 100             | 50 |
| D  | 75              | 35 |
| E  | 40              | 20 |

*Table 1: Current model for converting A-Level grades to Leaving Certificate points*

The current model for converting A-Level grades to LC points (see Table 1), adopted in 2010 by all Irish universities following the introduction of the A-Level A\* grade, was based on the reality that significant proportions of those UK students applying to Irish universities at that time were presenting four A-Levels. However, the profile of those small numbers who have traditionally applied to Irish universities is somewhat different to the overall profile of UK students where, according to data provided by the Department of Education and Learning in Northern Ireland, less than 15% of the NI school leaving cohort sit four A-Level subjects.

The current model also means that those A-Level applicants who are not sitting four A-Levels cannot realistically compete for any courses at universities in the Republic of Ireland where current admissions requirements exceed 515 points (the points awarded for the achievement of three A-Level A\* grades and one AS A grade). It has also been pointed out that students with these A-Level achievements will regularly be offered places in the most competitive UK universities and courses.

#### Principles for a revised model

Given the requirement to ensure fair and equitable access to Irish universities for all EU applicants, and the general desire of the universities to encourage greater numbers of UK applicants, particularly from Northern Ireland, it was agreed that the current conversion model should be adapted.

University admissions officers were charged by TGRUSE with proposing possible alternatives. Various options were discussed, and the following principles for any alternative model were agreed:

- Points should be weighted in favour of the first three A-Levels, as a large majority of A-Level students sit only three A-Levels;
- Additional points should be awarded in recognition of achievement in a fourth A-Level or for a fourth AS-Level;
- A revised model should ensure that A-Level grade distribution and LC grade distribution across respective populations are matched as closely as possible.
- A revised model and the rationale underpinning it should be easily understandable for a variety of audiences.

Using CAO, State Examinations Commission, UK NARIC and UK National Pupil Database data, a number of possible models were examined by university admissions officers and considered against the above principles. This work included mapping each possible model to the detailed statistical comparisons of A-Level and LC grade distributions.

### Recommendation

Based on the above, TGRUSE is happy to recommend the following revised model for converting A-Level grades to Leaving Certificate Points for the purposes of university entry, to begin in the academic year 2016/17.

|           | A-Level | 4 <sup>th</sup> A-level or AS |    |
|-----------|---------|-------------------------------|----|
| <b>A*</b> | 180     | 60                            |    |
| <b>A</b>  | 150     | 50                            | 30 |
| <b>B</b>  | 130     | 45                            | 25 |
| <b>C</b>  | 100     | 35                            | 20 |
| <b>D</b>  | 65      | 20                            | 15 |
| <b>E</b>  | 45      | 15                            | 10 |

*Table 2: Recommended revised model for converting A-Level grades to Leaving Certificate points*

The advantages of this revised model are as follows:

- It recognises the extra achievement involved in sitting a fourth A-level OR a fourth AS;
- It maintains the existing 6:4 subject ratio agreed by the relevant UK and Irish authorities regarding the calibration between LC and A-Levels;
- It maintains an A-Level grade distribution broadly in line with LC grade distribution, differing by no more than 5-15 points for the aggregate achievement of 3 A-levels with AS, which is less than other possible models proposed.

The disadvantages of this revised model include:

- It is more complex to convey to applicants than current model;
- It continues to combine separate sittings (i.e. A-Level with AS in the previous year), which is not permitted for LC applicants.

**February 2015**



Undergraduate Studies Committee

Meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2015.

**Item 5. Proposed A-Level Recalibration Model**

|    | <b>A-Level</b> | <b>4<sup>th</sup> A-level or AS</b> |    |
|----|----------------|-------------------------------------|----|
| A* | 180            | 60                                  |    |
| A  | 150            | 50                                  | 30 |
| B  | 130            | 45                                  | 25 |
| C  | 100            | 35                                  | 20 |
| D  | 65             | 20                                  | 15 |
| E  | 45             | 15                                  | 10 |

The table below provides a comparison between the current scoring scheme and the scheme being proposed.

| <b>3 A-levels with AS</b> | <b>Proposal</b> | <b>Current Points</b> | <b>4 A-levels</b> | <b>Proposal</b> | <b>Current Points</b> |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| A*A*A*a                   | 570             | 515                   | A*A*A*A*          | 600             | 600                   |
| A*A*Aa                    | 540             | 500                   | A*A*AA            | 560             | 570                   |
| A*A Aa                    | 505             | 485                   | A*AAB             | 525             | 540                   |
| AAAb                      | 475             | 465                   | AAAB              | 500             | 525                   |
| AABb                      | 455             | 450                   | AABB              | 475             | 510                   |
| ABBc                      | 430             | 425                   | ABBC              | 445             | 475                   |
| BBBc                      | 410             | 410                   | BBBC              | 425             | 460                   |
| CCCd                      | 315             | 335                   | CCCD              | 320             | 375                   |

Examples of minimum entry points for undergraduate courses in 2014:

|                  |      |                |      |
|------------------|------|----------------|------|
| Law              | 525* | PPES           | 540  |
| Law and Business | 570* | Dental Science | 575* |
| English Studies  | 500* | History        | 470  |